



Wellness-Fitness

Program Newsletter

April 2008



April is Cancer Control Month

The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that during 2008 about 186,320 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer and about 183,000 women will find out that they have breast cancer. This makes them two of the most common cancers in the United States. Together, prostate cancer and breast cancer cause more deaths than any other type of cancer except lung cancer.

Prostate cancer: Should men be tested?

Prostate cancer tends to grow slowly, so early detection is very important. One way to detect prostate cancer is with a blood test that checks the level of prostate-specific antigen (PSA). As a prevention measure, doctors monitor PSA levels over time in combination with routine examinations.

Scientists are studying prostate cancer to find out more about its cause and prevention. However, right now, no cause-and-effect relationship has been discovered. We do know that those at higher risk include:

- Men older than age 50
- African American men
- Brothers, fathers and sons of men who have had prostate cancer

Breast Cancer: Early detection is key

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women in the United States. One in every eight women develops breast cancer. The most important strategy in improving survival is still breast cancer screening and early detection.

Mammograms are the most powerful tool for early detection of breast cancer. This special x-ray of the breast, along with yearly clinical breast exams by a doctor, detects more than 95 percent of breast cancers. The ACS recommends that most women should begin having a mammogram every one to two years starting at age 40.

Women with known risk factors for developing breast cancer should talk with their doctor about scheduling

screenings at an earlier age. Studies have identified several factors that may increase a woman's risk:

- Advancing age
- Inherited gene mutations (such as the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene)
- A family history of breast cancer
- Giving birth at an older age or not having children at all
- Starting to menstruate before age 12 or going through menopause after age 55

What about prevention?

Any positive changes that you make, either alone or in consultation with your doctor, have the power to improve your chance for a healthy future.

Here are some suggestions:

- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight or obese as an adult raises the risk for developing several types of cancer.
- Exercise regularly. Studies have shown that walking briskly for 75 minutes to 2-1/2 hours a week may reduce risk by nearly 20 percent. That's as little as four 20-minute walks a week.
- Limit alcohol use.
- Be careful with some dietary supplements. Large trials are looking into nutritional supplements, such as vitamin E and the mineral selenium. Before taking any type of supplement for any reason, talk with your doctor, weigh all the risks and benefits and get a complete exam.

Talk with your doctor about your personal risk factors and the most appropriate screening tests for all types of cancer.

Get the latest information on Cancer Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Website at www.cdc.gov/cancer.

Tai Chi

Is it for you?

World Tai Chi and Qigong Day is April 26th. Is the practice of the martial arts for you? The concept of "martial arts" normally evokes images of violence and bruising bouts in competition for that black belt.

While *tai chi* is considered one of the martial arts, the emphasis is on "art." Tai chi is the practice of slow, rhythmic, meditative movement. The people that you see moving gracefully in parks in China are practicing tai chi. Tai chi is becoming more popular in the United States as Americans look for new and different ways to exercise.

Qigong and Tai Chi

Tai chi evolved from *qigong*, an ancient Chinese discipline that involves engaging the mind, breath, and movement to create a calm, natural balance of energy. *Qi* (pronounced "chee") means "life force." Tai chi is designed to promote a balance in the qi.

Tai chi styles

Tai chi is performed in a series of slow, graceful movements. These movements make up what are called forms (routines). In tai chi, each movement flows into the next. No matter which style you practice, they all are conducted slowly, deliberately, and gracefully, with each movement flowing seamlessly into the next without hesitation.

Like yoga, there are many varieties of tai chi to choose from. Some of the more popular styles include the *yang* style, the *wu* style and the *tai chi chih* styles.

Of these, the yang style is the most demanding because you must keep a wide stance and the knees are bent most of the time. The wu style is gentler because of its narrow, higher stance and the knees are not bent as much as the yang style. Finally, the gentlest style is tai chi chih, which not only uses a

higher stance but also incorporates much less transfer of weight from one leg to the other leg than the other two styles.

Benefits of tai chi

In China, it is believed that tai chi can delay aging and prolong life; increase flexibility and strengthen muscles; and prevent many illnesses. Unfortunately, there hasn't been a good deal of scientific evidence to support all of these claims. However, tai chi movements do seem to improve balance and can improve aerobic capacity.

Some reasons to practice tai chi:

- Movements are low-impact and gentle and put minimal stress on your muscles and joints.
- The risk of injury is very low.
- You can do it anywhere, anytime.
- It requires very little space and no special clothing or equipment.
- You do it at your own pace.
- It can be done in groups or by yourself
- There are lots of movements to keep interest high.

Try tai chi to improve your well-being and decrease stress. It's a gentle martial art that has been practiced for centuries by millions of Chinese. Could all of them be wrong?

Remember to check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program.

Visit the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/taichi/> and learn more about tai chi

Five-a-day to *Fight Cancer*

To protect against cancer you should maintain a healthy weight, avoid tobacco, and eat a variety of fresh foods. While no single food is the panacea for cancer prevention, a diet that provides a combination of vitamins and minerals can help in prevention.

In 1997, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) published 14 dietary recommendations (including a recommendation against tobacco use) to reduce cancer incidence. Since then, researchers have studied these recommendations and their findings have been encouraging.

By following the five-a-day recommendation, you'll get a jump on cancer prevention.

Here are some examples of foods that researchers have identified as being particularly helpful in protecting against cancer:

- Green leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale, romaine lettuce and leaf lettuce contain fiber, folate, and a variety of carotenoids.
- Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and brussels sprouts have been associated with a lower risk for cancer.
- Broccoli and tomatoes may have a positive effect on tumors.
- Berries are good sources of vitamin C and fiber.

Here are some tips for making fruits and vegetables part of your daily fare:

- Include vegetables and fruits with every meal and snacks.
- To get the most out of vegetables, don't overcook them. Try steaming or microwaving vegetables, or eating them raw.
- Watch out for sugary fruit drinks: Make sure juice drinks are not diluted. Look for 100 percent juice.
- Add fruit to breakfast cereals or yogurt.
- Explore fruity options: Try kiwi, papayas, mangos, raspberries, blueberries, melons, cranberries, strawberries, pineapple.

Every day, more evidence is found that supports the importance of dietary fruit and vegetables to promote health and prevent disease.

The American Institute for Cancer Research, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute all support a recommendation to regularly consume between 5 and 10 servings of a variety of colored fruits and vegetables in order to reduce cancer risk.

Learn more about the value of fruits and vegetables at www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov.

"The first wealth is health."

- Emerson

Options for Summer: Are you Considering Camp?

It's just spring, but it's not too early to begin planning summer activities for kids. Today's busy employees may find it challenging to fit a search for summer care into their schedules.

How do parents know which camp is best? That depends on many different factors including the child's age, how easily he or she handles separation from the family, the child's interests and unique needs—and the parents own preferences. Day camp is often a good choice for younger children because they can spend the day with other children their age and return to their own home and family at night.

For parents considering sleep-away camps, it's best that the child be both old enough and emotionally ready for the experience. The American Camping Association and the National Camp Association* recommend that a child be at least six years old to attend a residential camp. In addition, the child should possess a sense of independence, and the ability to adapt to nights away from home. Another strong indicator of readiness is when the child expresses an interest in going away to camp.

To help prevent homesickness at sleep-away camps, parents should select a camp that is close to home. It is also a good idea, if possible, to consider having the child attend with a friend or relative. Another way for parents to smooth the transition to a sleep-away camp is to arrange for their child to contact another camper prior to attending camp (the director may be able to provide a list of names of campers who will be in the same cabin).

This way, the child will know at least one other child when he or she arrives. Parents should remember that most children need a few days to adjust to being away from home, so they shouldn't panic if their child expresses homesickness the first few days of camp. Usually, homesickness fades with time, as a child makes friends and becomes comfortable in the camp's surroundings.

This information was brought to you compliments of the *FOH Work/Life Program*.

The Work/Life Program can make it easier for employees to locate the best summer camp without sacrificing valuable personal time or taking time from work. Work/Life consultants can help employees of agencies that participate in FOH's Work/Life program by researching summer camps that will meet employee-specified criteria. Find out if your agency participates in the FOH Work/Life Consortium.

For more resources and information, check out the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Family Guide at <http://family.samhsa.gov/teach/summer.aspx>.

*Find out more about camping from the American Camping Association (www.acacamps.org) and the National Camp Association (www.summercamp.org).

FOH, the Occupational Health Provider of Choice for the Federal Government

The mission of FOH is to improve the health, safety, and productivity of the federal workforce. Created by Congress in 1946, FOH is a non-appropriated service agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Program Support Center.

Federal agencies throughout the U.S. and overseas can access FOH services. FOH provides worksite health services, Wellness/Fitness, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Work/Life, Environmental Health and Safety, Organizational and Professional Development, and Training and Education.

Contact FOH at **(800) 457-9808** or visit us at www.foh.dhhs.gov.
